

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 310296 TOSEC 130047

NODIS

CHEROKEE

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 8054 ACTION STATE DEC 30.

QUOTE S E C R E T DAMASCUS 8054

NODIS

CHEROKEE

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SY, US

SUBJECT: HUSSEIN'S ROLE IN WEST BANK/GAZA DIALOGUE

SUMMARY: IF HUSSEIN DECIDES TO ENGAGE IN THE CAIRO PROCESS,
THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR THE UNITED STATES OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF
A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST MAY BE GREATER THAN
THE RISKS FOR KING HUSSEIN. ASSAD WILL LASH OUT AT THE KING FOR
HIS DEFECTION, BUT SYRIA HAS LIMITED CAPABILITY TO DETER THE
KING AND SOME INHIBITIONS AGAINST USING THE WEAPONS AT ITS
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DISPOSAL. THE MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM IS THAT THE MORE ISOLATED ASSAD
FEELS, THE GREATER WILL BE HIS INCLINATION TO RELY INCREASINGLY
ON THE SOVIET UNION AND TO MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF ARAB REJECT-
IONISTS. THIS WILL INCREASE THE DIFFICULTY OF REINTEGRATING ASSAD
INTO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND STRENGTHEN THE SOVIET POTENTIAL
FOR PLAYING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN COMPREHENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS.
END SUMMARY

1. I HAVE THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS ON RISKS WE AND HUSSEIN
WOULD RUN WITH SYRIANS IF HE ENTERS A TRILATERAL

DIALOGUE.

2. RISKS TO THE UNITED STATES

ASSUMING IT REMAINS IN OUR INTEREST TO SEEK A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT, WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT JORDAN'S ENTRY INTO THE CAIRO PROCESS, AT THIS TIME WILL CREATE ADDITIONAL RISKS FOR OUR REALIZING THAT OBJECTIVE. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT ENOUGH LATER ON TO "LAUNDER" THE CURRENT CAIRO PROCESS, HOWEVER SUCCESSFUL IT PROVES TO BE AS A NEGOTIATION, SUFFICIENTLY TO CONVINCE ASSAD TO RE-ENGAGE IN THE PEACE PROCESS, PERHAPS AT GENEVA. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE PROCESS SADAT INITIATED CANNOT ANSWER SYRIA'S GOAL OF ACHIEVING A PALESTINIAN SOLUTION OR OF RECOVERING THE ENTIRE GOLAN HEIGHTS.

3. JORDAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGUN

HUSSEIN WILL DEEPEN ASSAD'S SUSPICION THAT THE US IS TRYING TO WELD AN ISRAELI-MODERATE ARAB AXIS AGAINST SYRIA. ASSAD WOULD SEE HUSSEIN'S DEFECTION AS A MAJOR BLOW TO HIS LONG-STANDING POLICY OF STRENGTHENING

BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH JORDAN, TO HIS BELIEF THAT ONLY A UNIFIED ARAB WORLD CAN BALANCE ISRAELI POWER IN THE AREA, AND TO HIS RELATED HOPE THAT SYRIA CAN ATTAIN ITS OBJECTIVES THROUGH NEGOTIATION
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4. ASSAD'S MOST LIKELY REACTION TO JORDANIAN PARTICIPATION WOULD BE TO INTENSIFY THE EFFORTS HE BEGAN AFTER SADAT'S JERUSALEM VISIT, TO STRENGTHEN HIS TIES TO THE SOVIET UNION, AND TO MOVE FURTHER TOWARDS A REJECTIONIST POSITION ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. THE EFFECT WOULD BE GREATER POLARIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST BETWEEN ARAB MODERATES AND REJECTIONISTS AND BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES. THE GREATER THE POLARIZATION IN THE AREA THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR ASSAD TO RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS ON TERMS HAMMERED OUT IN THE CAIRO PROCESS AND THE MORE WE WILL HAVE TO RELY ON THE SOVIET UNION TO HELP BRING SYRIA AROUND.

5. SYRIAN MOTIVATION TO BLOCK HUSSEIN

ASSAD DOES NOT WANT TO BE ISOLATED WITH THE REJECTIONISTS AND THE SOVIET UNION BUT THIS WOULD RESULT FROM WHAT FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE WILL BE A PRINCIPAL AIM OF SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY: DENIAL TO SADAT IN HIS NEGOTIATIONS THE PROTECTIVE COLORING OF ARAB SUPPORT. HE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP IS STRONGLY MOTIVATED TO MOVE AGAINST ANY ARAB LEADER WHO WOULD APPEAR READY TO PLEDGE SUPPORT TO THE CAIRO PROCESS. ASSAD HIMSELF IS EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED TO AN ATYPICALLY HIGH DEGREE AND WOULD WANT TO EXERT MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON HUSSEIN IF THE KING JOINED BEGIN AND SADAT. HOWEVER, THE ACTUAL LEVERS HE HAS TO THREATEN

HUSSEIN ARE FEW.

6. SYRIAN LEVERAGE

(A) ECONOMIC: THE TRADITIONAL SYRIAN METHOD FOR SHOWING DISPLEASURE WITH JORDAN WAS RECALL OF AMBASSADORS AND CLOSURE OF BORDERS. THIS IS A DOUBLE-EDGED WEAPON. ECONOMICALLY, THE JORDANIANS MIGHT SUFFER MORE THAN THE SYRIANS WERE A TRADE EMBARGO TO BE SLAPPED ON BY DAMASCUS. BUT BOTH COUNTRIES WOULD SUFFER AND BOTH ECONOMIES WOULD
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MANAGE TO SURVIVE. CLOSING THE BORDERS WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT NOT JUST JORDANIAN-SYRIAN TIES BUT WOULD IRRITATE THE SAUDIS AND GULF STATES AS WELL AS THOSE LEBANESE ENGAGED IN THE MAJOR TRANSIT TRADE VIA JORDAN FROM MEDITERRANEAN PORTS. WE CONCLUDE THAT INTERRUPTING ECONOMIC COOPERATION FOR POLITICAL REASONS WOULD NOT BE IN EFFECTIVE WEAPON AND IS NOT LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED.

(B) PALESTINIANS. THE SYRIANS HAVE JUST CREATED A MECHANISM FOR SYRO-PALESTINIAN COOPERATION IN THE SO-CALLED MILITARY, POLITICAL AND INFORMATION COORDINATING COMMITTEES. KHADDAM HAS HELD WELL PUBLICIZED SESSIONS WITH PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES OF THESE COMMITTEES DURING THE PAST WEEK. ONE INTELLIGENCE REPORT IN MID-DECEMBER DESCRIBED SYRIAN PERMISSION TO THE FEDAYEEN TO REOPEN THREE CAMPS SITUATED IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO THE JORDANIAN FRONTIER, WHICH HAD BEEN CLOSED AT JORDAN'S REQUEST OVER A YEAR AGO. WE KNOW THIS IS WORRISOM TO THE JORDANIANS. DAMASCUS IS ALSO REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING ALLOWING HABASH'S PFLP TO REOPEN ITS OFFICE IN THE SYRIAN CAPITAL. THESE REPORTS, ALL OF WHICH HAVE EITHER BEEN ALREADY PICKED UP BY JORDANIAN INTELLIGENCE OR WILL SHORTLY BE KNOWN TO AMMAN, WILL LIKELY BE READ AS EVIDENCE THAT SYRIAN IS PREPARING TO FRUSTRATE JORDAN'S DESIRE TO MAINTAIN A QUIET FRONTLINE WITH ISRAEL. THESE INFILTRATORS COULD ALSO BE TURNED AGAINST JORDANIAN TARGETS. IN ANY EVENT, HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST STEPS TO UNLEASH THE FEDAYEEN TO OPERATE ACROSS JORDAN, REVERSING ITS POLICY OF COOPERATING WITH AMMAN TO KEEP THE FEDAYEEN OUT.

(C) IRAQ. SYRO-IRAQI RELATIONS REMAIN FROZEN, HOWEVER, DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS ASSAD HAS TAKEN A SERIES OF INITIATIVES TO WARM UP THESE TIES AND RESTORE A COOPERATIVE
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RELATIONSHIP WHICH DURING HIS SEVEN-YEAR REGIME FLOWERED ONLY AT THE TIME OF THE OCTOBER WAR. IRAQ'S CONDITONS FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS, MUCH LESS NORMALIZATION, MAY REMAIN UNCACCEPTABLE TO DAMASCUS. CERTAINLY THE TRIPOLI CONFERENCE

DID NOTHING TO IMPROVE PROSPECTS. THE IRAQI AMBASSADOR HERE PRIVATELY PREDICTED DECEMBER 28 THERE WOULD BE NO CHANGE IN HIS GOVERNMENT'S "PRINCIPLED STAND CRITICAL OF SYRIA." DESPITE BAGHDAD'S CONTINUING HOSTILE POSTURE, HOWEVER, THE IRAQI INTERNAL SCENE IS MURKY AND WE SHOULD NOT RULE OUT A DECISION BY SADDAM HUSEEIN TO MEND FENCES WITH SYRIA. WERE THERE TO BE A BREAKTHROUGH IN SYRO-IRAQI RELATIONS, HUSSEIN'S VALUE IN ASSAD'S EYES COULD DRAMATICALLY DIMISH. ONE STRONG SYRIAN MOTIVATION FOR GOOD TIES WITH JORDAN HAS STEMMED FROM THEIR COMMON INTEREST IN BLOCKING IRAQI SUBVERSION AGAINST BOTH THEIR COUNTRIES.

7. CONSTRAINTS ON ASSAD

BASICALLY I THINK THAT PROVIDED HUSSEIN MAINS DISCRETION ABOUT A DIALOGUE WITH BEGIN AND/OR SADAT, ASSAD WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO MAKE AN IRREPARABLE BREAK WITH THE KING. FIRSTLY, ASSAD HAS INVESTED A GOOD DEAL OVER THE PAST SUVE YEARS IN DEVELOPING BOTH HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE KING AND A NETWORK OF ECONOMIC, BUREAUCRATIC AND MILITARY TIES WITH JORDAN. SECONDLY, HE WOULD BE MINDFUL THAT OVERT SYRIAN HOSTILITY TOWARDS HUSSEIN COULD BE BAKEN AMIS IN THE PENINSULA WHOSE LEADERS, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE THEIR OWN DIFFERENCES WITH HUSSEIN, ARE GENERALLY PLEASED WITH THE FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSAD AND THE KING. THIS RELATIONSHIP STARKLY CONTRASTS WITH THAT OF THE LATE 50S AND THROUGHOUT THE 60S WHEN SYRIA'S BAATH PARTY ACTIVELY PLOTTED HUSSEIN'S OVERTHROW. MAJOR PRESSURES BY DAMASCUS ON HUSSEIN, WOULD, I BELIEVE BE INTERPRETED IN THE PENINSULA AS AN OMEN OF WHAT THEY THEMSELVES MIGHT EXPECT FROM DAMASCUS. AND ASSAD'S AWARENESS OF THIS WOULD PRBABLY LEAD HIM TO CONCLUDE IT REMAINS HIS INTEREST TO PRESERVE
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MINIMALLY DECENT RELATIONS WITH JORDAN. FINALLY, THE SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAS FOUND THE KING AND CERTAIN OF HIS ADVISORS VALUABLE INTERPRETERS TO DAMASCUS OF WESTERN AND PARTICULARLY AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY. ON OCCASION HE HAS USED AMMAN TO EXPLAIN HIS POSITIONS TO US. (IN THIS CONNECTION, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT ASSAD ALLOWED NO CRITICISM OF HUSSEIN BY SYRIAN MEDIA IN THE WAKE OF WORLDWIDE PUBLICITY LAST FEBRUARY ABOUT THE KING'S INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH US INTELLIGENCE.)

8. NEDD FOR CONTINUED JORDANIAN DISCRETION

SYRIAN MOTIVATION TO USE WHAT LEVERS IT POSSESSES WILL BE MINIMIZED THE MORE HUSSEIN KEEPS HIS TRILATERAL DIALOUGUE DISCREET, IF NOT SECRET. DAMASCUS HAS KNOWN ABOUT HUSSEIN'S BILATERAL CONTACTS WITH ISRAEL FOR MANY YEARS, BUT ASSAD HAS APPARENTLY NEVER SEEN FIT TO CHALLENGE THE KING ABOUT THEM. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE KING COULD MAINTAIN CONTACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CAIRO PROCESS DISCREETLY. IT APPEARS FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT THAT TO REALIZE THE FULL BENEFITS OF HIS ENTRY

BOTH ISRAEL AND CAIRO WILL WANT TO PUBLICIZE THE KING'S PARTICIPATION. THUS, WE MUST ASSUME THAT WORD OF HUSSEIN'S CONTACTS WOULD QUICKLY LEAK. AT THAT STAGE, I EXPECT THE SYRIANS TO MENACE HUSSEIN PRIVATELY. THE TWO DIFFICULT MEETINGS HERE IN DECEMBER BETWEEN JORDANIAN PRIME MINISTER BADRAN AND SHARAF WITH ASSAD AND KHADDAM SUPPORT THIS EXPECTATION. SHOULD THE KING PUBLICLY CHALLENGE SYRIAN SENSITIVITIES BY SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, I WOULD ANTICIPATE ASSAD'S APPROVING BOTH MEDIA ATTACKS AGAINST HUSSEIN AND ENCOURAGING STEPPED-UP PALESTINIAN GUERRILLA ACTIVITY EXPRESSLY AIMED AT DESTABILIZING THE JORDANIAN REGIME.

9. THE FOREGOING ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT SYRIA'S CAPACITY TO RETALIATE AGAINST HUSSEIN, SHOULD HE DECIDE TO ENTER A DIALOGUE, IS LIMITED. THE GREATER RISK IS TO US INTERESTS
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IN THE WHOLE PEACE PROCESS IF HUSSEIN MOVES IN A WAY WHICH CHALLENGES DAMASCUS, EXCITES THE ALREADY DEEP SYRIAN PARANOIA ABOUT A US-EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ANTI-SYRIAN AXIS, AND LEADS ASSAD TO BELIEVE HE SHOULD ACCELERATE HIS PRESENT DRIFT TOWARDS REJECTIONISM.

10. SUGGEST PASS AMMAN, CAIRO, TEL AVIV, TEHRAN FOR ATHERTON.
MURPHY UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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